

# The Pro Knows

– A Q&A with Steve Dallas

From the first tee to the clubhouse, **Steve Dallas** has the winning formula.



**I**N WRITING, THEY SAY, “WRITE WHAT you know.” And for success in business, the formula may be similar. At least that’s what golfer Steve Dallas, of Mesa, has done. A successful player on the course, Dallas has established a golf business reputation that has proven successful and profitable despite the variety of issues facing daily fee operations. At the age of 56, he is a co-owner of Las Colinas Golf Course and responsible for golf operations management for three more Phoenix-area courses. Following his recent win in the Arizona Four-Ball (teamed with Ed Smith), Dallas spoke with *Arizona*, *The State of Golf Magazine* about his golf careers, his golf business philosophy and the state of his favorite game.

**State of Golf:** How did you get your start in the golf business?

**Steve Dallas:** After finishing up college golf at Seattle University, I played several mini-tour events, the South African tour, Asian tour, Australia tour and Canadian tour. After that time, I decided my game wasn’t as good as I thought it was, [so I] got into the golf business by joining the golf staff at Sahalee Golf & CC in Redmond, Wash. I was fortunate to be able to work for Tag Merritt for the next four years, and that experience was invaluable to my career in the golf business.



**SOG:** There are some pretty good stories about your friendship with PGA Tour player Fred Couples. How did you two meet, and how have you helped his career?

**SD:** I met Fred through his older brother Tom, with whom I played high school and college baseball with. Fred became interested in playing golf about the time I finished college, and I got him started with a set of clubs and helped him with his golf swing. Fred had a lot of natural ability and his swing hasn't changed much over the years. I took him as my caddie in local tournaments, and we stayed in contact while he was in college at the University of Houston.

**SOG:** Has Couples reciprocated?

**SD:** Both Fred and I got busy with our lives – he as a traveling tour professional, and myself with a wife and family who I moved to Arizona. When it worked out, we would try and make contact when one or the other was in town. We still remain friends today, and I keep up on how Fred

is doing mostly by way of Tom, who also resides in Arizona.

**SOG:** How would you evaluate the golf industry today?

**SD:** The golf industry today has gotten very competitive, as the high-end courses have joined the mix in competing for the local golfers in the offseason.

**SOG:** Despite a flat golf industry, you have prospered. What has been the secret to your success?

**SD:** It's no secret that you have to be smart about costs and spend the money where it provides the best return. I have always been hands on and stay on top of the day-to-day business dealings and activities at the golf courses.

**SOG:** How would you define the ideal golf business model?

**SD:** You have to supply a good product

for a reasonable rate and provide good customer service. Maintaining the pace of play on the golf course, in my opinion, is the number one customer service goal for any golf course.

**SOG:** What's next? What are some of your personal and professional goals?

**SD:** Golf is my passion, and I personally strive to maintain my good health so I can continue to play competitive golf and show the young bucks how it's done [referring to his participation in the Arizona Four-ball Championship]. To support my passion, my professional goal is to continue to manage three to four courses. Managing more than four courses makes it difficult to find the time to play and stay on top of business.

**SOG:** The three common criticisms of golf are it takes too long to play, it's too expensive and it's too difficult to learn. How have you addressed these problems?

**SD:** I have specific procedures to manage the pace of play at my courses. Utilizing starters and rangers and making our players aware of the time expectation for their round helps us overcome slow play. A good pace of play allows you to maximize the number of players each day and gets you repeat customers. Golfers are benefiting from the competition [between courses] and golf is more affordable than ever. And as for being too difficult to learn, golf isn't for everyone. You have to have the passion or you will never overcome the feeling that it is too difficult. If it was easy, it wouldn't be golf!

**SOG:** How much golf do you play, and what kind of scores are posted in your handicap? What are your playing goals?

**SD:** I try to play two times a week, and practice two to three times a week. I'm a +1 handicap and my scores are relative to that, usually par or better. I only have one playing goal, and that is to keep playing and working on my game. ■